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ABSTRACT

Oklahoma's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) initiative was developed to meet requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. CSPD compensates for the state's geographic diversity through regionalization, which allows a grassroots approach to determining preservice and inservice training activities for special education teachers that are unique to the needs of each region but support a unified vision and strategic plan. The Southern region's activities exemplify the rural focus. The region comprises the southern half of Oklahoma, is the largest region in the state, and has only one metropolitan area. Quarterly meetings rotate around the region and highlight a facility or program of interest, with a flexible schedule to allow for travel time. The region's three main priorities include increasing the supply of teachers and ancillary staff to serve students with low-incidence disabilities, formalizing methods of cross-group/agency information exchanges, and including higher education in its initiatives and efforts. Three task forces have addressed these priorities by conducting training workshops for teacher assistants for visually and hearing impaired students; developing a professional development newsletter; and coordinating annual workshops on collaboration, co-teaching, special education law, and discipline. East Central University, the state department of education, the Oklahoma School for the Blind, and other agencies have collaborated on these efforts. The potential for replication of this initiative in other rural states is discussed. (TD)

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# PIONEERING EDUCATION LEADERSHIP FOR 2001: OKLAHOMA'S CSPD INITIATIVE FROM A RURAL REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to share information about Oklahoma's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) statewide initiative, from the perspective of one of the four rural regions in the state. The statewide CSPD effort in Oklahoma provides a vehicle for collaboration and coordination of professional development, preservice, and inservice training activities for personnel who work with students with disabilities. The target audience for this paper includes regular and special education personnel from common and higher education, related service providers, and interagency personnel involved in providing services to persons with disabilities from birth through adulthood.

Sharing information about Oklahoma's statewide CSPD initiative is important, due to the increasing focus on CSPD, which has been evident in the reauthorization and subsequent amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Oklahoma initiative began with leadership from the Oklahoma State Department of Education Special Education Section. The initiative involves stakeholders from all agencies across the state and includes parent participation, as well. On-going since September of 1994, the initiative emphasizes regional strategic planning and the continuous participation of "regional action teams" working toward a shared vision and an on-going strategic plan for CSPD.

The regional action teams allow for strategic planning on a grassroots level to address the "ruralness" of each region. The activities of one of the four regional action teams will be discussed to provide an explanation of the process of regional strategic planning. The development, implementation, and subsequent impact of the region's activities on regional and statewide levels will be reviewed. The potential for replication will also be discussed.

## THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CSPD STRATEGIC PLANNING

The national perspective on CSPD strategic planning has evolved through changes in federal regulations, renewed emphasis on professional development across programs at the federal level, and pertinent issues which drive change, such as teacher shortages in special education. A brief review of the history of CSPD in special education and rehabilitation legislation includes the following highlights:

- P.L. 94-142, Part B (3-21) regulations implemented in 1975, included CSPD components of preservice, evaluation, needs assessment, collaboration, dissemination, technical assistance, and continuing education;
- P.L. 99-457, Part H (0-3) regulations implemented in 1990, included a CSPD component;
- Vocational Rehabilitation regulations added a CSPD component in the early 1990's;
- P.L. 101-476, reauthorization of P.L. 94-142, directed State Education Agencies to coordinate and facilitate CSPD with support of stakeholders (IHEs, LEAs, etc.) and added Part H (families), along with Vocational Rehabilitation;

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Throughout this history of CSPD, most states addressed fragments of CSPD components and may or may not have included all of the components.

Additional renewed emphasis, at the national level, for changes in professional development and CSPD has been generated through the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and the Office of Special Education Programs. The perspective from these agencies is that professional development and CSPD are a vehicle for change for quality education. The Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, established the U.S. Department of Education's Professional Development Team. The team's mission was to examine the best available research and exemplary practices related to professional development, and to summarize lessons learned from this knowledge base in the form of principles that might inform practitioners and policymakers across the country, and guide the Department's efforts in the area of professional development. The mission statement and principles of professional development, now part of the *Federal Register*, emphasize the belief that high-quality professional development reflecting the principles, which are grounded in the practical wisdom of leading educators across the country, will have a positive and lasting effect on teaching and learning. The mission of professional development, adopted by the U.S. Department of Education, is "to prepare and support educators to help all students achieve to high standards of learning and development." The mission and underlying principles can be found in the U.S. Department of Education brochure, "Building Bridges: The Mission & Principles of Professional Development." The CSPD umbrella, which includes Part B, Part H, and Vocational Rehabilitation, embraces the mission and principles of the Department, and includes collaboration as the key to quality education through quality personnel by taking the proactive role of strategic planning to address data collection, personnel preparation (preservice), continuing education (inservice), education research, promising practices, and dissemination. Federal regulations specifically impacting CSPD are included in the IDEA Title 34. Title 34 of the Act includes CSPD requirements under Part B (Sections 300.139, 300.153, 300.224, 300.370, 300.380, 300.381, 300.382, 300.383, and 300.555), Part H (Sections 303.360 and 303.361), and Vocational Rehabilitation (Section 361.18).

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION ON OKLAHOMA'S CSPD INITIATIVE

Oklahoma's CSPD initiative began in 1993. In September of that year an 8-member delegation participated in the CSPD Institute sponsored by CEC and the National Institute on CSPD Collaboration. The 8-member delegation established the CSPD Leadership Team for the state of Oklahoma. Through the team's participation in the CSPD Institute a "vision" was created and "strategic planning" began. The team reviewed existing CSPD strategic planning models from states that were already involved in implementation. Oklahoma's CSPD Initiative incorporates facets from the Montana model. As the strategic plan was being developed, it became apparent to the CSPD Leadership Team that a major, critical link was missing—involvement with and participation of higher education stakeholders. The Oklahoma State Department of Education CSPD Leadership Team sponsored Oklahoma's first "Pioneering Education Leadership 2001" CSPD Institute, including representation from all private and public universities in the state, as well as other stakeholders. Participants were divided up regionally to begin the process of brainstorming, problem solving and strategic planning.

The data and theoretical base which was the impetus behind the Oklahoma CSPD initiative began with the technical assistance provided to the CSPD Leadership team, through the CEC and the National Institute on CSPD Collaboration. Karl Murray, the Director of this project, has been involved in CSPD at both the state and national levels for 19 years. He has been one of the main presenters at both of Oklahoma's "Pioneering Education Leadership 2001" conferences held in 1994 and 1996. His experience and expertise led to the presentation of research-based information and theoretical practices which address systemic school reform and the changing role of SDEs, empowering leaders to lead others to implement change, creating a vision and translating that vision into reality, and the five disciplines of

learning organization from Peter Senge. The following articles discuss the research and theoretical practices:

- "Systemic School Reform: The Challenges Faced by State Departments of Education" by Susan Follett Lusi, which addresses the changing roles of SDEs (i.e. teaming, defining and refining implementation as work progresses, and judging their performance in terms of outcomes produced);
- "Empowering Organizations, Empowering Leaders" by Clay Carr, which theorizes that in empowered organizations, empowered leaders lead others to implement change and achieve goals;
- "Managing the Dream" by Warren Bennis, which references a business-based leadership trait of creating a vision and translating that vision into reality; and
- "The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, A Conversation with Peter Senge" edited by Colleen Lannon Kim, which defines *building a shared vision, personal mastery, mental models, team learning, and systems thinking* as the five disciplines.

Oklahoma's CSPD initiative has been successful due to the implementation of practices based on vision and leadership theories, as well as the training and technical assistance provided through the National Institute on CSPD Collaboration.

## STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF OKLAHOMA'S CSPD INITIATIVE

The structure and organization of Oklahoma's CSPD initiative is based on the involvement of all stakeholders at a regional level. The regionalization concept permeates the initiative at all levels. The following heirarchy depicts the structure and organization of Oklahoma's CSPD initiative:

- CSPD Vision
- Oklahoma State Department of Education CSPD Leadership Team
- CSPD Leadership Regional Representatives
- CSPD Implementation Council and Strategic Plan
- CSPD Regional Action Teams

## DEVELOPMENT OF OKLAHOMA'S CSPD VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN

As previously stated, the 8 member CSPD Leadership Team, in 1993, established the initial "vision" and began strategic planning. In 1994, at the first "Pioneering Education Leadership 2001" CSPD Institute the "vision" and strategic plan were presented to all stakeholders. Through the process of regionalization, developing regional partnerships, and regional strategic planning, the vision was refined. The unified vision statement, officially adopted in January of 1995, states:

*The Oklahoma vision is for children, youth, families, professionals, and communities to work together to create an accepting, respectful, and accessible environment for all. Community members and all individuals working with children and youth will collaborate to assure family involvement, provide smooth transitions at all stages of the educational process, and ensure that all children and youth are successfully prepared for participation in the community.*

### THE REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Regional strategic planning was initiated at Oklahoma's first "Pioneering Education Leadership 2001" CSPD Institute. Stakeholders representing vocational rehabilitation, general education, special education, higher education, administration, parents, legislative members, vocational-technical education, related services providers, and consumers from the four regions in the state were invited to participate in

the institute. The four regions, previously identified by the CSPD Leadership Team included Central, Northeastern, Northwestern, and Southern. The process of developing regional partnerships and regional strategic planning began at the institute. Stakeholders from each region worked with a facilitator to begin this process, which included environmental scanning, identifying and prioritizing needs, and identifying Regional Action Team Representatives (chairpersons) to lead Regional Action Teams and serve as members of the CSPD Implementation Council. Participation of Regional Action Team Representatives as part of the CSPD Implementation Council assures that regionalization remains an integral part of the statewide CSPD initiative. The Council also provides for membership of representatives of higher education (IHEs), local education agencies (LEAs), the Oklahoma Regents of Higher Education, parents, advocacy groups, Vocational-Technical Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and others as appropriate. The mission of the CSPD Implementation Council is to:

- actively develop an on-going strategic plan to implement the CSPD vision;
- provide a forum to discuss issues related to personnel preparation and retention on a statewide basis;
- provide advice and oversight for changes in existing policy and rules affecting personnel development;
- recommend changes in delivery of preservice and continuing education;
- promote personnel development opportunities for all individuals, including families and general educators, involved in the education of students with disabilities; and
- provide leadership and direction for CSPD Regional Action Teams.

The CSPD Implementation Council meets on a quarterly basis, annually, to maintain the direction of the initiative. The Council also conducts an annual 2-day planning meeting during which they review regional priorities, state priorities, regionalization, and the CSPD Strategic Plan. This allows for changes to be made in the statewide CSPD initiative as needed.

The role of Regional Action Teams is to provide a forum for communication, to identify regional personnel development needs, and to implement activities based on those needs. The regionalization concept encourages an efficient use of resources statewide. Beginning with their initial experience of regional strategic planning at the first "Pioneering Education Leadership 2001" CSPD Institute, Regional Action Teams have the following purposes:

- provide regional voices to inform the Oklahoma State Department of Education of regional needs;
- provide regional involvement in CSPD decision-making;
- provide an informed network to provide input for the CSPD Leadership Team;
- assist in identifying stakeholders in planning for subsequent CSPD Institutes;
- provide a vehicle to implement positive change statewide;
- provide assistance with recruitment, retention, and training to improve services to children and families;
- assist in addressing statewide special education concerns;
- include other service providers in the network;
- continue to identify stakeholders;
- keep administrators involved and link with LEAs;
- link with service providers, IHEs, general education, special education, Early Intervention Units (Part H), Oklahoma State Department of Education, and other state agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Technical Education;
- insure state and local parent involvement;
- make community connections;
- expand statewide CSPD Strategic Plan and set priorities for implementation;
- identify and prioritize needs;
- insure proactive implementation;
- move CSPD Strategic Plan to each region/community;

- help facilitate the development and implementation of regional/community plans to assist with the statewide CSPD Strategic Plan;
- avoid parallelism in organizations/entities;
- begin political action on pertinent issues related to CSPD;
- focus on awareness, education, and information sharing (i.e. disability awareness);
- work to support joint special education/early childhood certification; and
- develop mechanism for dissemination of regional staff development information.

Each Regional Action Team has taken its own grassroots approach to address regional priorities and to develop activities to support the CSPD Strategic Plan. Regional Action Team participation of CSPD Leadership Team/Implementation Council members ensures that each of the regions annually revisit the Strategic Plan and refocus on regional strategic planning. Each region engages in the process of reviewing activities conducted in relation to the Strategic Plan. Regional Action Teams revisit the regional strategic planning process of identifying all stakeholders and conducting environmental scanning. The regions then proceed in identifying and prioritizing needs for the upcoming year. This cycle has proven effective for the continued proactive implementation of the CSPD Strategic Plan. A second "Pioneering Education Leadership 2001" CSPD Institute was conducted in 1996, which also helped in refocusing of the statewide initiative.

**SOUTHERN REGION CSPD ACTION TEAM ACTIVITIES: REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION and IMPACT OF REGIONAL AND STATEWIDE LEVELS**

The Southern Region CSPD Action Team covers the largest geographical region in the state. During the first regional strategic planning session in 1994, the stakeholders were overwhelmed by the geography issue faced by the region. Through the process of environmental scanning and the identification of priorities, it became apparent that several issues were of common concern. The Southern region identified three main priorities that correlated to the CSPD Strategic Plan. These priorities included:

- increasing the supply of low incidence teachers and ancillary staff;
- formalizing methods of cross group/cross agency information exchanges; and
- inviting, welcoming, and enthusiastically including higher education while offering resources to support IHE initiatives and efforts.

Beginning with these three priorities, the region began its own grassroots approach to the statewide CSPD initiative. The priorities have remained essentially the same since the beginning of the initiative due to great and on-going needs in these areas.

The Southern region's Regional Action Team Representatives currently include a higher education person, an outreach coordinator for the Oklahoma School for the Blind, and a special education teacher/federal programs coordinator from an LEA. The region elected to conduct its meetings on a quarterly basis, in between CSPD Implementation Council meetings. Meetings for the year are scheduled in the spring or fall, to coincide with the schedule for Implementation Council meetings. The meetings are rotated around the Southern region to allow participation of team members from across the southern half of the state. Meeting locations are chosen with a purpose to highlight a facility or program of interest to team members. The meetings follow an established agenda, with a flexible schedule (11:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.) to allow for travel time for all involved. Lunch is included as part of the meeting schedule. The meeting agenda consists of welcome, introductions, State & Federal Update, Task Force Group Reports, Discuss This and/or Next Year's Projects/Training, Overview and FYI, and Close Meeting. This has proven to be an effective format for the continuation of regional strategic planning and conducting activities.

The three main priorities led to the establishment of task forces which include a Teacher Assistant Training Task Force, an Information Dissemination Task Force, and a Collaboration Task Force, which correspond respectively to the priorities listed above. The task forces work between meetings to plan and conduct activities to meet the prioritized needs. The accomplishments of each task force are described in the paragraphs that follow.

The Teacher Assistant Training Task Force established a prioritized list of low-incidence ancillary staff needed to provide services. These included teacher assistants for Blind/Visually Impaired, Deaf/Hearing Impaired, Emotionally Disturbed, and Speech/Language. Beginning with the Blind/VI low-incidence area, the task force developed a course outline, curriculum, training materials, and a resource guide. The task force established correspondence to local schools, provided registration packets, and arranged for facilities and speakers for specialized training for Teacher Assistants working with Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired. The training was a collaborative effort of the Southern Region CSPD Action Team, the Oklahoma School for the Blind, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, East Central University, and the University Affiliated Program. The initial 22-hour training was conducted in April of 1997. Since its inception, the training has been repeated four times, and an advanced level of training was planned and implemented. This specialized training for teacher assistants of Blind or VI has been in great demand and has provided training for 84 ancillary staff from across the state, who work with the Blind or Visually Impaired. The task force was pleasantly surprised to find out that one of the teacher assistants had gone on to pursue teacher certification for Blind/Visually Impaired. Oklahoma has few "home-grown" Blind/VI teachers. The second low-incidence area identified for teacher assistant training was the Deaf/HI area. Again the task force worked through the process to establish this training. The initial training for this low-incidence area was conducted in February of 1998, providing training for 22 teacher assistants of the Deaf or HI. The second training, conducted in February of 1999, provided for 20 teacher assistants. The demand for this type of training continues to be great, with more applicants than slots for each training session provided. The third low-incidence area addressed by this task force was Emotionally Disturbed. The initial pilot for this training is scheduled to be conducted in April of 1999. The collaborators for each training have remained basically the same, with Oklahoma School for the Deaf being added for the Deaf/HI training. East Central University Office for Continuing Education, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, the University Affiliated Program, and the Southern Region CSPD Action Team have been constant collaborators across all low-incidence teacher assistant training projects.

The Information Dissemination Task Force has addressed the priority of formalizing methods of cross group/cross agency information exchanges. This task force has implemented a Professional Development Newsletter, which is published quarterly and distributed to stakeholders across the Southern region. The newsletter is published between quarterly meetings of the Southern Region CSPD Action Team, highlights the agenda from each meeting, and provides a list of upcoming professional development opportunities. The newsletter is mailed to approximately 300 contacts at all agencies, IHEs, and LEAs in the Southern region. This task force hopes to establish a technology-based form of information dissemination, namely a website, through a link with the Oklahoma State Department of Education or another agency. While this is a future plan, the task force realizes that not everyone has access to technology innovations, and thus will maintain the Professional Development Newsletter.

The Collaboration Task Force addresses the both the second and third priorities established by the Southern region. This includes formalizing the methods of cross group/cross agency information exchanges and inviting, welcoming, and enthusiastically including higher education while offering resources to support IHE initiatives and efforts. This task force has identified timely issues to address in regional workshops. Through collaboration with East Central University Office for Continuing Education, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and other agencies (i.e. Cooperative Council of Oklahoma Schools Association) an annual regional workshop is provided at no cost. Timely issues

such as collaboration, co-teaching, special education law, and discipline issues have been addressed. Dr. Marilyn Friend, a nationally recognized speaker on collaboration, was featured in February of 1998 at a Southern region conference, entitled Creating Inclusive Schools: Moving from Concepts to Reality. This opportunity provided training for 100 participants. Continuing with this effort, the task force planned and conducted a second regional conference, in February of 1999, entitled The Law, IDEA, and You! This conference focused on special education law and discipline issues and provided training for 140 participants. This task force plans to continue the effort to address the priorities of collaboration/formalizing methods or cross group/cross and cross agency information exchanges and offering resources to support IHE initiatives and efforts in continuing education.

**POTENTIAL FOR REPLICATION IN VASTLY DIFFERENT RURAL AREAS and PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

Oklahoma's CSPD initiative focuses on the rural aspects of the state and its geographical diversity, which includes four major metropolitan areas and rural areas where the population is sparse. Due to this geographic diversity, the initiative compensates through the concept of regionalization. Regionalization allows for a grassroots approach to determine preservice and inservice training activities unique to the needs of specific regions. Using environmental scanning, identifying, and prioritizing needs, the regions have taken a proactive approach to CSPD and the Strategic Plan. Each region can tailor activities to reflect their rural characteristics, while supporting the unified vision and CSPD Strategic Plan. The Southern Region CSPD Action Team perspective exemplifies the rural focus. The region geographically comprises the southern half of Oklahoma, is the largest region in the state, and has only one metropolitan area. Through strategies aimed at overcoming this barrier, the Southern region has conducted activities to support the unified vision and CSPD Strategic Plan, which have impacted both regional and statewide training and services.

The Oklahoma CSPD initiative has potential for replication in other states that are largely rural. Regionalization can be duplicated for CSPD and other initiatives. The number of regions can be determined on a state-by-state basis, according to geographic diversity. Activities developed by Regional Action Teams in Oklahoma have potential for replication. State-level CSPD funds have been funneled to the regions for activities and this type of support can also be duplicated in other states. The steadfast leadership and support of the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Special Education Section, CSPD Leadership Team has been instrumental in ensuring the success of this initiative to improve services to person with disabilities in Oklahoma. This, too, can be duplicated in other states through the development of vision and strategic planning.